

GENERAL RECALL FEB 1979

REV. AL SCHMITT

FATHER SCHMITT HEROIC CHAPLAIN *Gerald S. Foreman, QM2c, 1938-41*

This story appeared for the first time in the veteran's paper Stars & Stripes to call attention to the Original Dedication of the SCHMITT MEMORIAL on September 16, 1973. This, the 2nd edition, is to likewise publicize its re-dedication on May 26th, 1979 by the U.S.S. OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION

Far away from both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans where she lived out her short life span, the battle ship OKLAHOMA-is to be memorialized with a monument overlooking the Father of Waters at Dubuque, Iowa -- the Schmitt Marker.

Who was Aloysius H. Schmitt? He was the chaplain of the OKLAHOMA and the first chaplain to lose his life -- or rather to give it -- in World War II. Everett Sanderson has taken up the project for a Schmitt Marker with a vigor and determination that tells the casual observer, "Here is a man who does his work out of love - and he will succeed."

He has worked on it for over eight years.

I knew Father Schmitt -- not very well, I will admit; for I was Protestant and went to other ships for Sun day services; but if anybody had asked me if someday he would be a hero - I would have thought how could he? An unobtrusive man quiet -- almost timid... is this what heroes are made of? Now, let me relate a story of a gift of a life

At 0715 on the morning of December 7th, 1941 a sailor on his way to his working station may have passed the open door of the ship's Library and.. have seen the Chaplain holding early Mass. He always went about his preparations for the Sunday Services in a businesslike manner, and perhaps he was just a mite anxious about making a good impression on this, his first ship. After all, his predecessor was a full Commander.

Then it happened. "All hands, man your battle stations!" and then, as tho to punctuate it, a tinkling roar and a terrific jolt, the force of which no one had ever experienced before. "It's the Japs! No Shit! This is NOT a drill -- now get going- damn it!" It had to be so -- no one would dare use such language over the loud speaker system! But all this happened in seconds; there was no need for clarification now. Somehow they knew that World War Two had just begun.

Battle stations were manned in jiffy time despite the fact that the old OKLAHOMA was taking on a rapid list to port, and two more torpedoes had already struck home in quick and devastating succession. The Repair and Damage Control parties acting with super speed, had closed hatches and thereby excluded many from their battle stations in below decks spaces, and had caused them to double back topside and eventual safety. But the Chaplain's station was with, the medical people in the Sick Bay, and as the stricken vessel increased its degree of list, the word was passed to abandon ship -- and not a moment too soon.

In the Sick Bay, "Men were helping each other get out (of the porthole) for no other way could be found", said William A. Perrett, EMIC. "every man did all he could to help his shipmates"

He pushed himself and was pulled by helping hands thru the porthole -- wasn't it fortunate that the old OKIE still had the out-moded portholes? Not like the new designs, with their internal lighting. Then the Chaplain tried to squeeze thru, but he was a bigger man; not too athletic a build, and found it more difficult; but he could do it - with God's help. Then something stopped his forward progress -- in his back pocket was his Breviary. If he could just back into the compartment so that his hand would be free to remove it - "Boys, I am having a tough time getting thru!" at which all who were topside got a new grip, and tugged the harder, but it was no use --- the ship was still rolling smoothly and relentlessly.

"Men", he said, "You are endangering your lives and I am preventing others from getting out!" These words were shocking to the three who heard and they refused to let go. "Chaplain, if you go back in there, you'll never come back out!"

But there was an idea forming in his mind. His calling was to save souls -- wouldn't saving lives please God, too? He slipped back into the compartment he had so mightily tried to leave - with surprising ease - he thought. "You won't come back" haunted him; but he told himself this was his duty -- how wonderful that he should have it so clearly cut.

Now, other sailors were struggling in the rising water to reach the porthole. The first one he grabbed a firm hold of -- then up thru the port. He mumbled something like, "You'll make it," or was it a quotation from the Bible? No matter. Another shoved against his shoulder. The ship was going past the horizontal and was on the downward swing now. "Come on, you sailors" and "up you go." Now at last there were no more and he felt a little dizzy. Did he bump his head? - he had a sort of a pleasant feeling. Weren't drowning people said to be euphoric?

Then thru the musical sound of the gurgling waters of Pearl Harbor Lieutenant, junior grade, Aloysius Herman Schmitt, Chaplain Corps, USN, heard a distant voice that seemed to say, "Greater love hath no man than this: who will lay down his life for his friends. Well done, thou good and faithful servant".